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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

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TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Qatar, Syria/Iran,
Syria/Israel, Palestinian Territories, Iraq, Lebanon (7/1-3)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers reported President Asad's meeting with Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al Thani, that focused on the latest regional developments, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories. Talks also touched upon bilateral relations between Syria and Qatar.

Papers also cited President Asad's meeting with Ayatollah Imam Khomeini's grandson Hasan Khomeini, Director of the Ayatollah Khomeini Heritage Foundation, and an accompanying delegation. Talks during the meeting dealt with the friendly relations between the two countries and activities of the foundation. Iranian Ambassador to Syria, Mohammed Hasan Akhtari, attended the meeting.

Papers also cited a statement by the Cuban Foreign Ministry condemning Israel's violation of Syrian airspace, saying that this act "poses a danger to international peace and security". The Ministry stressed that the violation further escalates tension in the Middle East. It also strongly denounced Israel's military aggression in the Gaza Strip, stressing that Israel behaves arrogantly toward Palestinians, encouraged by unlimited US support. It called upon the international community and all peace-loving countries to act immediately to demand that Israel withdraw from Gaza and stop state terrorism against the Palestinian people.

Papers also reported that Syria has rejected accusations of the United States Ambassador to the United Nations against Syria as "baseless, unacceptable and untrue." Participating at the UN Security Council's emergency session to discuss the deteriorating conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, Syria condemned Israel's haughty practices, saying, "The Israeli military escalation poses a real threat to the world's security and stability." "Israel, paying no heed to legitimate international resolutions, tries again to draw the region into a cycle of violence by widening the ambit of struggle in the Middle East," Syria's Acting Permanent Envoy to the UN said [The name of the Syrian diplomat was not cited by the news report] "Israeli fighters flying over the Syrian coast are a screaming breach of international law and constitute an unjustified provocation against a sovereign independent state," he indicated. The Syrian diplomat underlined that "the US ambassador, who appointed himself as a defender of Israel's brutal aggressions, is the last

one with the right to throw out such accusations, particularly since biased US policies and distortion of facts are causes of extremism and terrorism in the world." "The US, to cover hostile Israeli policies against the Palestinian people, will never serve a just and comprehensive peace but will exacerbate the situation." The diplomat expressed hope that the UN will shoulder its responsibility to contain the deteriorating situation and the tragic circumstances that the Palestinian people are passing through.

All papers featured a mass demonstration at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus on Sunday evening protesting Israeli practices against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian territories. Protestors chanted slogans condemning the barbarian Zionist aggression which has destroyed humans, trees and stones in Gaza and other Palestinian cities.

Demonstrators also carried banners hailing Syrian solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and demanding that the international community put an end to Israel's dangerous violations against the Palestinian people without any consideration of international legitimacy or minimum human rights

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad discusses the latest developments in the region and bilateral relations with Qatari Foreign Minister" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/2)

"President Asad reviews relations of friendship between Syria and Iran with Ayatollah Imam Khomeini's grandson Hasan Khomeini, Director of the Ayatollah Khomeini Heritage Foundation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/3)

"Angry reactions to the provocative Israeli violation of Syrian airspace: Violation of international law; the world is being called upon to exert pressure on Israel" (Government-owned

Tishreen, 7/1)

"Cuba condemns Israeli warplanes' violation of Syrian airspace" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/3)

"Syria rejects accusations of the US Ambassador to the UN: Bolton has appointed himself as a defender of Israel. Israel is practicing state terrorism. The US covering up of Israel's aggressive policies against the Palestinian people aggravates tension in the region" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/2)

"Foreign Minister al-Mouallem discusses the dangerous deterioration in the occupied Palestinian territories with former Italian Foreign Minister Demichelis" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/3)

"Israeli occupation forces attack Hanieh's office. Olmert orders his forces to liberate the Israeli soldier and to use all means of force against Palestinians" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/3)

"Paying no heed to Israeli terrorism, US President Bush calls for release of the Israeli prisoner. Israel rejects releasing Palestinian prisoners and continues its open aggression" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/2)

"New deterioration in President Bush's popularity. 66 Iraqis killed, 87 injured in an explosion in Baghdad" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/3)

"A huge demonstration at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus to denounce Israel's aggression against Gaza. Arab and Islamic protests amidst world silence. The Zionist war storms the people of Gaza" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/1)

"Palestinian PM Hanieh: The Israel occupation doesn't seek the kidnapped Israeli soldier, but seeks to foil the Palestinian government. Israel rejects a conditional release of its two soldiers and resumes raids and incursions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/1)

"A new US military scandal: Slaughter of a whole Iraqi family. Burning of an Iraqi girl after being raped" (Government-owned

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Evading a Crisis and Domestic Failure"

Ilyas Murad, chief editor of government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (7/2): "Through its aggression on Gaza and accusations against Syria, Israel is trying to escape from its own crisis and failure by creating regional tension....

"Now, days into the siege and the killings and kidnappings of Palestinian MPs, the reasons and the truth of the Israeli aggression have appeared. It transpired that Israel was shocked by the capture of one of its soldiers and the killing of two others in the resistance attack on a fortified military position. Neither Israel's military nor its 'militant civilians' expected the resistance to be able to carry out such an attack. Perhaps they believed that aggression on and violation of Syrian airspace would help resolve their crisis through an incident that, to say the least, represents an attempt to evade the real problem. Mutual violation of airspace is possible anytime anywhere. Even small or weak countries can do it. Organizations also can do it. But we should discuss the reasons and dimensions of such an act.

"Troubled Israel wanted to create tension in the region and trigger new events that would perhaps move things back and foil Palestinian coherence, which was achieved despite all wagers to

the contrary. Perhaps it also wanted to provide a dose of support for those in Lebanon who are calling, through pretexts they put on the negotiating table, for disarming the resistance.... Israel wants to say that this harmony in consolidating the will of resistance and spreading consciousness of resistance, which is taking root in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon, is not allowed. Perhaps Israel also wants to offer support for some [Syrian opposition] symbols abroad who have stretched out a hand for negotiations with Israel and requested help and assistance.

"There is harmony between Israel and the US representative to the United Nations, who makes false accusations against Syria, its people and leadership."

"Partners in Lying and Aggression"

Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (7/2): "Just as the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza was a lie, the claim that Israel wants only to free its captured soldier will not be the last in the series of lies that Israel makes as part of the hostile schemes that are drawn up and discussed in advance with Washington and some Western capitals.

"There were Israeli reports saying that the Israeli operation in Gaza was planned weeks before the capture of the Israeli soldier and that the objective is to undermine the HAMAS government and crush the will of the Palestinian resistance....

"Israel and the United States are partners in lying. They insist on sticking to old lies as they fabricate and believe new ones. In the meantime, Israel is making progress in its effort to impose a fait accompli on the world and prepare it to accept its next plans, while the principle of political realism flourishes among some Arabs who are no longer provoked by the images of blood and destruction in Palestine!"

"A Gang Enjoying International Protection"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (7/1): "All hell broke loose when Palestinian commandoes captured an Israeli soldier in a military operation. Every party in the world, led by the administration of US President George Bush, made painstaking efforts to obtain the release of this soldier of Israeli identity and French nationality.

"The superpowers have not stopped defending killers and criminals. The frenzied attempts to release the soldier, who left his country and came to kill the people of Palestine, are continuing around the clock. When Israel committed a flagrant act of piracy in broad daylight and arrested -- indeed kidnapped -- a number of ministers and parliament members who were democratically elected by the Palestinian people, no one in this 'free' world bothered to condemn the act, which can be committed only by mafia and terror gangs.

"All that this world, which claims to be civilized and to be a champion of human rights, could do was issue a generous call for 'self-restraint,' a term that the 'civilized' ones usually use when they find themselves forced to admit that what Israel's armed gang has done goes beyond all imagination and transcends all the red lines that mean brutal massacres against the Palestinians....

"What elicits sorrow, regret, and anger, all at the same time, is that a superpower that is supposedly in charge of world peace and security is blessing the acts of this gang and providing it

with protection under false justifications, such as terming its acts self-defense....

"But this is how we have known the Bush administration and its allies. And this is how Israel will continue to practice aggression and all kinds of terrorism, including the violation of the airspace of Arab countries - Syria and Lebanon in particular. Nothing will deter it as long as the 'civilized free world' is providing all necessary protection for the terrorist Israeli gang."

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